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Draft report

Addendum

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Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001 (item 4 (b))

Section 17. Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific

1. At its 21st and 22nd meetings, on 18 June 1999, the Committee considered section 17, Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001 (A/54/6 (Sect. 17)).

2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced the budget section and responded to queries raised during the Committee's consideration of the budget section.

Discussion

3. Support was expressed for the multifaceted role of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific as the only intergovernmental forum for regional cooperation for development for the Asian and Pacific region as a whole.

4. Support was expressed for the programme, for the emphasis given to the three major themes: regional economic cooperation, poverty alleviation and environment and natural resources development, and for the four priority areas established by the Commission. It was noted that the programme of work was in accordance with the revised medium-term plan.

5. The importance of the programme was highlighted, taking into account, in particular, the financial crisis that had occurred in the region. Appreciation was expressed for the studies undertaken by the Commission on the financial crisis in the region. Appreciation was also expressed that emphasis will be given, *inter alia*, to research and analysis of the

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effects of the economic and financial crisis and to the formulation of recommendations on ways and means for countries to respond to the crisis and to minimize the attendant risks. Support was also expressed for activities related to the countries with economies in transition. The need to enhance national capacities as regards electronic trade was emphasized. It was noted that there was no reference to coordination on environmental activities between the Commission and the United Nations Environment Programme.

6. It was noted that the proposed programme of work for 2000–2001 was the first programme formulated on the basis of the cumulative reform efforts of the Commission, which included the conference structure as determined by the Commission in 1997, the programme structure as revised and approved by the General Assembly in 1998 and the subsequent organizational structure as presented in the proposed programme budget for 2000–2001. It was stated that progress on the reforms undertaken by the Commission should continue, in particular its review and evaluation mechanisms. A view was expressed that there were too many outputs and that they should be further streamlined.

7. The reduction in the proposed resources and the negative impact of the high vacancy rate on the programme were noted with concern. Concern was expressed that the overall level of the Commission's budget has been decreasing in the last two bienniums and will further decrease by 0.3 per cent for 2000–2001. It was considered that the Commission should be given the resources necessary to enable the full implementation of its programme of work. The need to reduce the use of consultants and to transfer that expertise to staff members was highlighted. It was felt that travel expenses should be kept in check and it was noted that a large share of resources continued to be devoted to administrative services. The view was expressed that an introduction of a review mechanism was called for, in line with the recommendations of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission.

8. Concern was expressed regarding the need to establish a balance between traditional and electronic methods of disseminating information to ensure that the needs of the least developed, landlocked and island developing countries, in particular, were met. It was stressed that the technical publications of the Commission should continue to be provided through the traditional means. It was considered that further rationalization of the publications programme should be made.

9. The activities related to gender mainstreaming, gender equality and the advancement of women and to combating violence against women and trafficking in women and children were welcomed. It was noted that, in paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 51/65 of 12 December 1996, the regional commissions, among others, were invited to examine ways and means, within their mandates, of dealing with concerns pertaining to women migrant workers. It was suggested that subprogramme 3, Social development, should also address the issue of violence against women migrant workers, in accordance with Assembly resolution 51/65 and related legislative mandates.

10. The view was expressed that, since the Commission had stressed the importance of the issue of regional and subregional cooperation for development, necessary resources should be made available for the full implementation of these activities.

11. Statements of expected accomplishments were welcomed, although it was noted that the wording was too general and would not, in some cases, facilitate an assessment as to whether they were achieved or not. The view was also expressed that programme managers need to implement more fully the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring and Implementation and the Methods

of Evaluation, which require self-evaluation and identification of activities that are inefficient, ineffective or irrelevant.

Conclusion and recommendations

12. The Committee noted with concern the high vacancy rate in the Commission, which could negatively affect the implementation of the programme of work.

13. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly should keep under review the resource situation of the Commission to ensure that the proposed reduction will not adversely affect the full implementation of its mandated programmes and activities.

14. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly approve the programme narrative of section 17, Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001, with the following modifications:

(a) In paragraph 17.4, the words

"will be further reviewed by the Commission at its fifty-fifth session, scheduled for 22 to 28 April 1999" should be replaced with "was further reviewed and approved by the Commission at its fifty-fifth session held from 22 to 28 April 1999";

(b) In the ninth line of paragraph 17.56 (a), the words ", including women migrant workers," should be inserted after the words "violence against women".